

VZCZCXRO2766
RR RUEHDBU RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHAH #0342/01 0930955
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 030955Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8589
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000342

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)
INFO SCA/PPD (VAN DE VATE), IIP/G/NEA-SA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO PREL TX](#)

SUBJECT: POST'S VIRTUAL EMBASSIES DRIVE OUTREACH IN A BUSY FEBRUARY

REFERENCE: Ashgabat 00216

SUMMARY

1. (U) While post was busy hosting visitors, including Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia, Richard Boucher (reftel), the

SIPDIS

Turkmenistan American Corners and Internet Access and Training Program sites continued to provide the venue for educational and cultural programs on the themes of Black History Month, women's issues, and journalism. The sites were also the staging ground for Model United Nations tournament preparations and outreach to marginalized groups in the community. End Summary.

Journalism Club Established in Turkmenbashy

2. (U) On February 2, a Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program alumna and a local health Peace Corps volunteer started a Journalism Club for nine local high school students at the Turkmenbashy City polyclinic. At the first meeting, the volunteer provided an overview of the value of journalism to a democratic society, and the theme of the first class was "the importance of mass media during elections." The theme bore particular importance for local youth because of the impending national election -- Turkmenistan's first-ever multi-candidate presidential election -- on February 11.

Peace Corps Prepares Youth for Model United Nations

3. (U) Peace Corps volunteers in several provinces began preparing young American Corner visitors to participate in a Peace Corps-organized Model United Nations Conference to be held in Ashgabat in April. In Turkmenabat, two Peace Corps volunteers organized a Model United Nations meeting on February 14 for 20 American Corner visitors, including several FLEX alumni. The volunteers explained the rules of Model United Nations debates and divided up the group by country topic assignments; the overarching theme of the preparatory research is how different countries cope with HIV/AIDS. For several years, volunteers have organized Model United Nations Conferences and conducted year-round preparation for American Corner visitors on current events, debate and research skills -- all training conducted in English.

Turkmenistan Youth Celebrate Black History Month

4. (U) The American Corners served as the venue for a number of events related to Black History Month during February, including presentations by alumni of U.S. Government exchange programs on the history of black people in the United States and on black women, and debates -- topics that are not taught in Turkmenistan's state schools and receive virtually no coverage in state media. In

Turkmenabat on February 20, a FLEX alumna taught 16 Corner visitors about the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Malcolm X and segregation. She then led a debate on the topic "There should be separate schools for white and black students" -- the "negative" team won the debate. In Turkmenbashi, the American Corner representative conducted a presentation on February 21 at the city polyclinic for 10 visitors. The session explored early immigration and slavery, revolution and rebellions, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement. A FLEX alumnus at the Mary American Corner gave a similar presentation for 15 Corner visitors on February 12; two more Mary FLEX alumni conducted a presentation on the Civil Rights Movement on February 22 for 25 Corner visitors. The two played a tape recording of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and moderated a debate on the different theories of resistance espoused by Dr. King and Malcolm X. Such discussions, which require both a basic grasp of civics and U.S. history, challenge the participants' critical thinking and communications skills and help them improve their English language skills.

American Corner Girls Teach U.S. Women's History to Peers

15. (U) On February 15, two FLEX alumni conducted a presentation on successful African-American women for 20 Turkmenabat American Corner visitors. They prepared handouts about Harriett Tubman, Condoleezza Rice, Whitney Houston and Beyonce Knowles, gave brief biographies of each woman and described their influence on U.S. history and culture. In the process they described the road from slavery to the Civil Rights Movement, and the current status of blacks in the United States.

16. (U) On February 15, a Dashoguz teenager who frequents the American Corner hosted the first of her weekly Girls Club sessions. Ten local youth attended this first session. The club highlights

ASHGABAT 00000342 002 OF 003

famous 20th century women and involves a weekly discussion, in English, of the legacy of these women. The young woman also incorporated English vocabulary and grammar points into the discussion. In both sessions, participants learned about U.S. history, the potential for female leaders -- by example as well as by the content of the class -- and practiced their English speaking skills.

Marginalized Youth Learn Computer Skills, English in Mary

17. (U) On February 12, two female Mary FLEX alumni helped teach a computer basics class for five children of the disabled at the local vocational center for the disabled. The two also led an in-house basic English class for six center children. Community Connections alumna Olga Byashimova and International Visitors Leadership Program alumnus Murad Byashimov organized the classes and helped recruit the children involved, while the FLEX alumni imparted basic computer skills to the children, such how to use Microsoft Windows software to create and find files. The English class began with the alphabet and pronunciation and some vocabulary. The participants in these classes, some of whom have already graduated from high school, do not have the funds to attend computer and English courses at a private educational center. The vast majority of state schools do not have computers or teach computer skills, and have only recently begun to teach English. These free classes also help establish a connection between these marginalized youth and the resources of the American Corner.

Mary Corner Youth Discuss Qualities of U.S. Presidents

18. (U) On February 20, a FLEX alumnus held a movie night for 15 American Corner visitors during which he screened a film and moderated a follow-up discussion. Participants watched a documentary about U.S. presidents George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Roosevelt and then discussed the personal qualities each president had and what qualities a person must have to be a leader. All discussion took place in

English, thus participants both learned about U.S. history and values, and developed their language skills. This alumnus hosts his own club on U.S. history and politics at the American Corner, often using International Information Program-developed videos and books the embassy orders for the Corners.

Mary Advanced Book Club Takes On "Life of Pi"

¶9. (U) On February 21, six Mary American Corner Visitors met with the resident Peace Corps volunteer for a second time to discuss their progress with the book, "Life of Pi," by Yann Martel. Students discussed the plot in the segment they had been assigned, and about topics that arose in the reading, such as animal rights, religion, and survival in times of distress. The three-month club teaches students reading comprehension skills, and helps improve their critical thinking and English conversation skills through the weekly discussions.

Turkmenistan Students Webchat about Water and Land Usage

¶10. (U) On February 14, more than 30 high school and college students and teachers from Ashgabat, Turkmenabat, Mary and Dashoguz joined a live forum discussion at Turkmenistan's Educational Portal on local and global environmental issues. Guest speaker Oleg Guchgeldiyev, United Nations Development Program Caspian Sea Fund Coordinator, responded to 14 questions on water quality, land degradation, desertification, logging, and other issues. Participants logged 83 entries in all, and Guchgeldiyev provided facts and references via links, encouraging participants to think of ways to protect the environment. The forum also explored students' involvement through the Global Connections and Exchange (GCE) program on the World Water Monitoring Day project in Turkmenistan and shared their results of testing water in Turkmenistan. Given the absence of educational programming on such topics on Turkmen State Television and in state schools, such educational web fora both educate the public and allow an unfettered exchange of ideas on state development priorities.

FLEX Alumna Increases Impact of Global Connections Project

¶11. (U) In February, a FLEX alumna finished a busy month of participating in GCE activities by becoming one of 35 semifinalists of the Tech Age Girls (TAG) program administered by embassy partner the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). No ordinary applicant, the alumna took the initiative to organize two TAG presentations, one at the American Corner and one in her school, to recruit the very girls against whom she would be competing for the TAG semifinalist spots. IREX chose the semifinalists (from a pool

ASHGABAT 00000342 003 OF 003

of 135) based on the applicants' creativity and innovation, leadership experience, interest in community service, and communication skills. On March 7, TAG semifinalists will start three months of intensive training on computer and Internet basics, text and graphic editing, Web design, blogs, leadership, and academic research skills. Girls will advance their skills, share their opinions, learn from successful female leaders and role models, create blogs and websites, and develop and lead their own projects.

Mutual Understanding through Online Exchange

¶12. (U) In February, students from Turkmenistan and U.S. schools participated in several dialogue projects online at the Turkmenistan Educational Portal to foster mutual understanding. Exchanges on the two countries' culture, nature, geography, state structure, economics, and many other topics helped participants get a better sense of what the other culture was like. Students also posted photographs and answered questions on their submissions. "Ashgabat sounds like a really nice place to visit!" a student from a U.S. school offered after learning about Ashgabat from her Turkmenistani peer. "Our sixth grade teachers and students are excited about the

opportunity to learn about another culture and country. Some of the students have done a little research on their own about Turkmenistan because they were so curious," a teacher of New Bedford Global Learning Charter School said. Turkmenistani children, largely exposed to U.S. culture through popular television shows and U.S. music, have few opportunities to interact directly with their U.S. peers. Most U.S. students -- and adults for that matter, know little about Turkmenistan. Online exchanges such as these help dispel misperceptions held by either side about the other.

¶13. (U) Dushanbe minimize considered

HOAGLAND